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ABSTRACT

Community school centers have evolved from many experiments in interagency cooperation and community involvement. A community school center is a place that provides a variety of services that may include health, recreation, day care and after school care for the young, senior citizen programs, job placement, vocational and manpower training, public library, adult education, performing and creative arts, crafts, family and youth counseling, municipal services, and public K-12 education. It is also a forum for focusing community action and improving the quality of life for the residents. This booklet is the first in a series that examines community school centers as a phenomenon of national importance to the coordinated delivery of social services, better use of public resources, and revitalization of community life. The publication is organized as a series of responses to questions about characteristics of centers, how the coordinated services work, shared space, governance, financing, planning, examples of existing centers, declining enrollments, assessing community needs, and how to get started in planning a community school center. (Author/MLF)

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A CONCERNED CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO COMMUNITY SCHOOL CENTERS

EA 011 464

#1 in a series of 6 booklets prepared by EFL

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Community school centers have evolved from many experiments in interagency cooperation and community involvement. One line of descent has been from the community education movement, which has long advocated that schools assume a leading role in expanding and coordinating community services and that education itself be broadly inclusive of all age groups, subject matter, and experience. Another line of descent has been from the parks and recreation fields which pioneered in developing park-schools as coordinated facilities and sites, with shared responsibilities in recreational programming. A third line of descent has been in the movement for citizen participation in government and planning, for which citizen activists and enlightened government officials are due credit.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which supported the preparation and publication of this series of reports on community school centers. The foundation has long been in the forefront of the community education field and has supported and encouraged community participation and community-based solutions to social problems.

Sincere thanks are due to the planners and participants in over 70 community school centers across the country who have shared with us their experiences, hopes, frustrations, and knowledge. Without this front-line reporting, this series would not be possible. We also thank the individual experts who provided advice and knowledge, and who read and reacted to early drafts.

Major responsibility for researching and writing this series was taken by EFL's Ellen Bussard.

EFL is a nonprofit organization that researches, publishes information, and provides services on facilities for "people serving institutions." Programs are supported by grants and contracts from foundations and government agencies.

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COMMUNITY SCHOOL CENTERS

FOREWORD

Our society is in the midst of change and challenge:

- The make up of our population is shifting, in that there are fewer school-age children, more elderly people, more working mothers, and more people retiring before age 65 and seeking "something to do."
- Ordinary citizens are seeking a greater role in determining our own collective future.
- We are becoming aware of the value of recycling and preserving community resources rather than laying waste and starting over.
- Continuing fiscal crises are challenging public institutions to seek ways of providing services for less money through more intensive use of available resources and cooperative planning.

Community school centers stand at the crossroads of these trends. Whether housed in recycled school buildings or in new facilities cooperatively planned and financed, these centers are becoming a focus of community and neighborhood life. These centers may include libraries, health clinics, elementary or secondary schools, swimming pools and other recreation facilities, day care centers, senior citizen services or other people-serving agencies. They may also be places where community organizations, social clubs, and union locals hold regular meetings and special events. In some, families and friends gather for reunions and baby showers. In common, they may be described as "people centers"; they provide a focus for community life.

This booklet is one in a series that examines community school centers as a phenomenon of national importance to the coordinated delivery of social services, better use of public resources, and revitalization of community life. ■

1 **A Concerned Citizen's Guide to Community School Centers**

2 **Planning Community School Centers**

3 **Managing Community School Centers**

4 **Facility Issues in Community School Centers**

5 **Using Surplus School Space for Community School Centers**

6 **A Resource Book on Community School Centers**

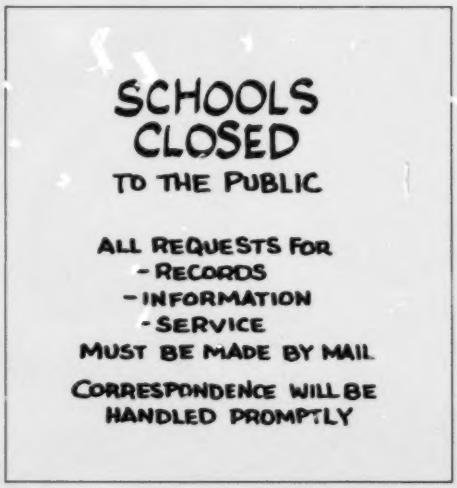
A CONCERNED CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO COMMUNITY SCHOOL CENTERS

INTRODUCTION

This guide has been prepared for people who care about community development, human services delivery systems, and public funding, but are not necessarily professional administrators, planners, or architects. Because of your concerns, we think you'll be interested in knowing about the community school center concept. It may be just right for your community.

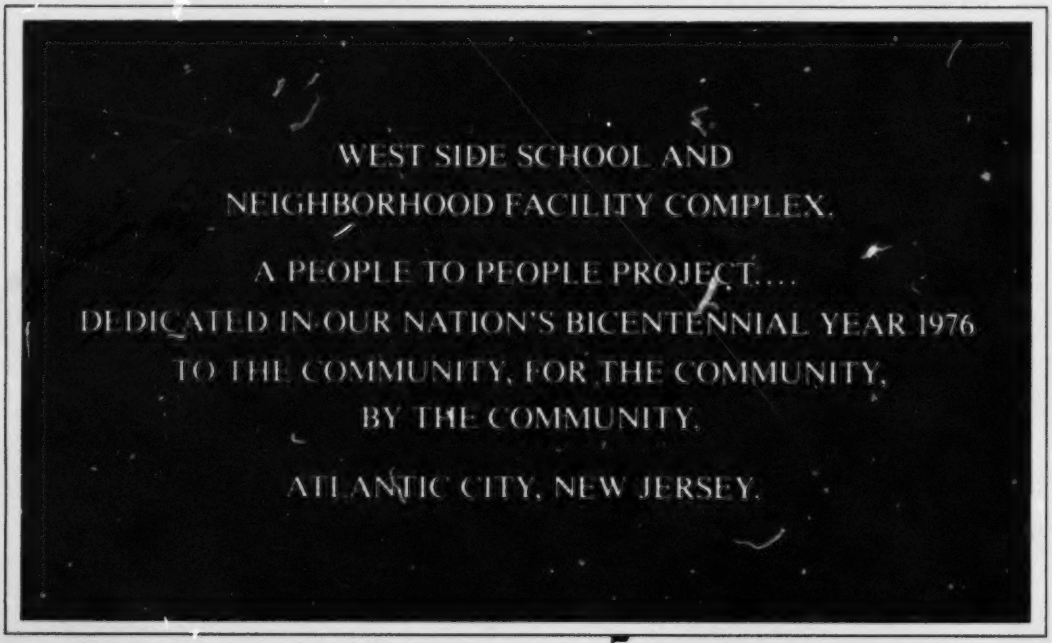
This publication is organized as a series of responses to the questions we are often asked by concerned citizens. We hope you'll find here the information you need to determine if the concept makes sense for your community. Reading this report is the first step in any planning effort.

If you would like more detailed information, we will be pleased to provide the other five booklets in the series. ■



Sign on the door of a New York City high school

Dedication plaque on Atlantic City community school center


WEST SIDE SCHOOL AND
NEIGHBORHOOD FACILITY COMPLEX.
A PEOPLE TO PEOPLE PROJECT....
DEDICATED IN OUR NATION'S BICENTENNIAL YEAR 1976
TO THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY,
BY THE COMMUNITY.
ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY.

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What is a community school center?

First off, there is no such thing as a community school center. Rather, it is a concept, or approach, to improve **the delivery of social services** at the neighborhood or community level and to provide a focus for community improvement. When the concept is translated into building, each center is different depending on the community and its needs. The places go by a variety of names—like the John F. Kennedy School and Community Center, Whitmer Human Resources Center, Quincy Community School, and South King County Multi-Service Center. So far, the best, most general term is "community school center." Just to confuse our definition a bit more, there may not even be a "school" in the center (in the sense that "school" is part of the K-12 public school system).

But, to define the concept, a community school center is a place that provides a variety of services which may include health, recreation, day care and after school care for the young, senior citizen programs, job placement, vocational and manpower training, public library, adult education, performing and creative arts, crafts, family and youth counseling, municipal services, and public K-12 education. It is also a forum for focusing community action and improving the quality of life for the residents.

The objectives of such centers are:

- To bring together the mix of services needed by the community, and provide better coordination of services.
- To deliver the services more efficiently, ideally at less total cost, by avoiding duplication and by sharing the costs of owning and operating the center.
- To put services nearer the people to be served by focusing on the community and neighborhood.
- To provide a better range of services and to enrich the programs that can be offered by exchanging facilities, staff, and programs among the agencies.
- To involve the community in the decision-making process, thus making services more responsive.
- To make resources available for general community use—for clubs, meetings, special events—that are of an informal ad hoc nature.
- To decentralize major services so that each neighborhood may benefit from easier access to those services.

A community school center serves the community in a variety of formal and informal ways. In a phrase, it helps make the sense of community more real. ■

To what problems are these centers trying to respond?

First is the problem of money. Citizens feel overburdened with taxes, especially property taxes, and want to see a better buy for their public dollar. Coordination of services and sharing of facilities and operating costs (the cost of energy alone for a building has tripled in five years) can save money—or at least spend it more efficiently.

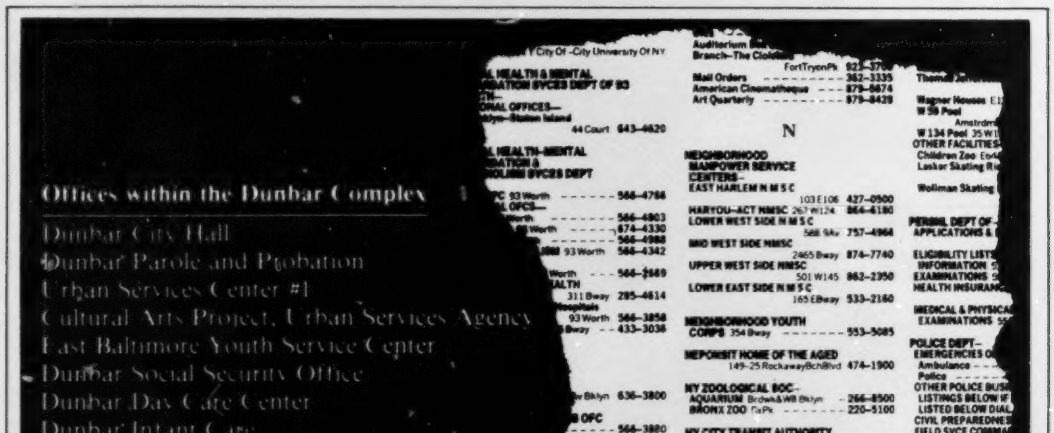
Second is the problem of agencies and institutions becoming too big, too bureaucratic, too unresponsive, and too removed from the people they are supposed to serve.

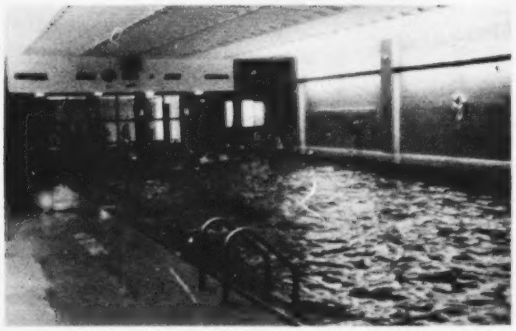
Third is the problem of fragmentation or pigeonholing of services. Families have many needs, needs that are difficult to meet if each agency or organization is operating from its own turf.

Fourth, we seem to be changing our attitudes about city and regional planning and development. We used to hear a lot about "saving cities," especially during the growth and boom days of the '50s and '60s. Now we hear more about neighborhood and community renewal. The center concept is consistent with this "small can be beautiful" approach.

Finally, shrinking enrollments (more on this later), shrinking public dollars, and shrinking energy resources need not mean fewer services for people. Creative solutions to maintaining and improving programs can spring from the creative energies of the community itself. And the synergistic effect of multiple agencies working together from a single place provides opportunities for such creative response. ■

Services that are usually scattered across town can be brought together in one convenient location


Offices within the Dunbar Complex
Dunbar City Hall
Dunbar Parole and Probation
Urban Services Center #1
Cultural Arts Project, Urban Services Agency
East Baltimore Youth Service Center
Dunbar Social Security Office
Dunbar Day Care Center
Dunbar Infant Care
Legal Aid East
Dunbar Social Services
HUD Southeast Area Office
East Baltimore Manpower Center
Harbor City Learning Center
Antioch College, Homestead—Montebello Center



Well, then, what characterizes such places and what makes them different from a school?

Usually a school is for one purpose: to house formal education programs for students from kindergarten through high school. It is owned, managed, and paid for by the local school district. Often, the school board also permits other groups to use parts of the building for meetings, plays and concerts, recreation and the like—usually on a rental basis, but sometimes without cost.

The community school center is different in that several agencies share space, and share the costs of owning and operating the center. There are also opportunities to share staff and services—the recreation department may pay for the construction of the swimming pool (which the school wouldn't normally have) and it may be used by the school during the day and by the recreation department at other times. Or scheduling may allow for school and community use during the school day. The pool staff may work for the school during the day, and then go on the recreation department's payroll after school, on weekends, and during vacations when the pool is open for community use. The center also provides space for other agencies and organizations to offer "part-time" programs. These may range from the Boy Scouts' troop meeting to the PTA's rummage sale, to a theater group's play.

Also, these centers provide a sort of "one-stop shopping" for community services by providing a variety of services that meets the needs of the whole family. In the past, each agency had its own building or offices and so, from the point of view of the family, services were fragmented. You would go to one place for public education, another place for recreation, another for health services, and a completely different place for senior citizen programs. Community school centers are an attempt to overcome this fragmentation by providing **coordinated services** which are **family-centered.**

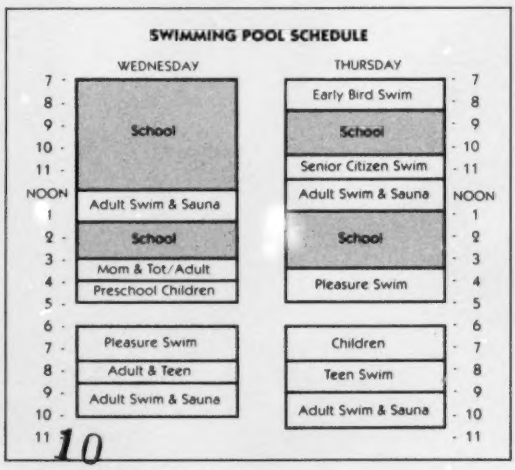
The community school center also provides opportunities for organizations and agencies to work together in meeting the needs of the community they serve. This may mean offering information and referral services, jointly operated programs, and complementary services and programs at the center. So the centers are also characterized by cooperation.

Community participation in planning and management is another characteristic of community school centers. To plan and manage centers that include several agencies and organizations—and cope with competing demands and needs—requires broader representation than does planning a facility for just one organization such as the school district. This participation usually involves community councils, advisory boards, neighborhood associations, and similar organizations.

Centers tend to be "open for business" all day long, and in evenings, weekends, and vacation periods, so that programs and services are **available at the time users are available.**

Finally, community school centers tend to be just that—**community** centers. Although what is defined as community will again vary from place to place, the intent of a community school center is to serve people with a common interest, and at a scale smaller than city or region. ■

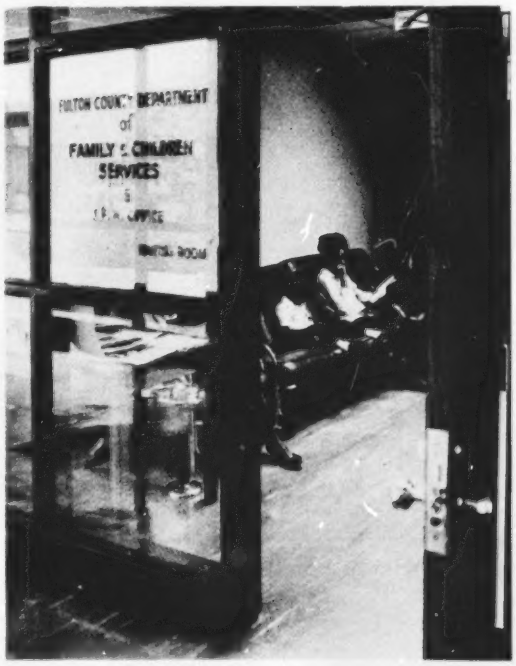
Making the most of shared recreation facilities



How does this coordinated services idea really work?

Let's take the case of a new family moving into the community. The family goes to the center and enrolls the youngsters in the school. If the mother is working, the preschool child is enrolled in the day care center. The father may need to improve employment skills, and he can enroll in the evening program at the center. Or if a parent is unemployed, the center may be a job placement center— or at least a family counselor can make the program referral. Problems with housing, Social Security, and other needs can likewise be handled. Some members of the family may sign up for recreation programs or for arts and crafts courses. Once the children are in school, health and dental checks may be available for the children through the clinic—and such services may be available for the whole family. And the grandparents may participate in the senior center program, which is also part of the larger center.

Again, each center and its array of services is different, and not all of those services are available in all centers. But at least the center provides an entry point and will help the family become a part of its new community. ■



You said at the beginning that each center is different. How do you know who and what ought to be in a center?

If we start with the assumption that each community is different—economically, socially, and physically—then it follows that the social service needs are varied, and the mix of services that goes into a center is also different. For instance, there may be a health clinic and children's services already in place, but no (or an inadequate) senior citizens center. So in that case, a new center might be planned to include the senior citizens center, but not to duplicate the existing services.

All this suggests that the right mix is determined by a planning effort which:

- Includes a wide range of persons and representatives of agencies and organizations who know the community and its needs, can help sort out priorities, work out funding and governance arrangements, and assure that the center meets the special needs of that community.
- Starts with an inventory of needs, and existing resources of facilities and program services. This inventory is extremely important as it provides the basis for sorting out priorities and determining the most important needs to be met. It also identifies duplication of services that might be reduced through coordination.
- Involves a look at city, district, or county-wide planning and development issues and proposals. Even though a particular center will be the end result, it must be planned in the context of the larger political jurisdiction.
- Recognizes that neighborhoods and communities are not static, but changing. Therefore, the planning effort must also be anticipatory—identifying those services that may eventually be needed, or those that will expand—and possibly those that may be reduced. For instance, if the center includes public school space and the district is experiencing enrollment decline, some space used for schools may eventually be turned over to other users. ■

Identifying community resources

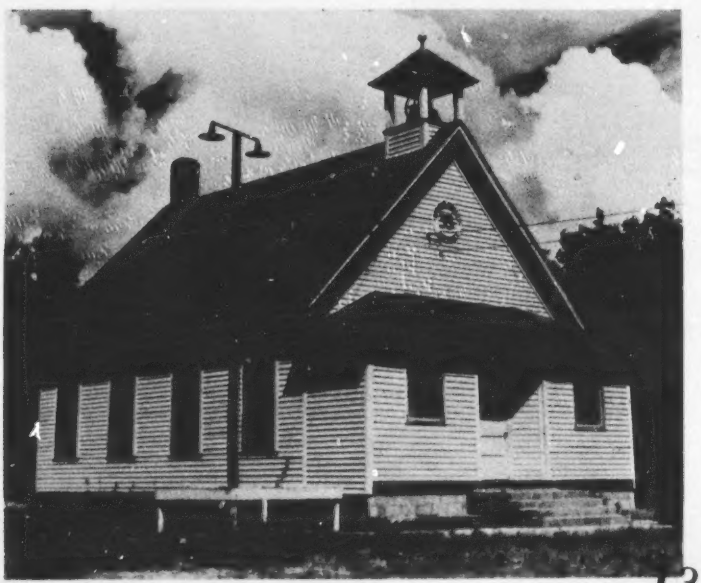
Is this a brand-new idea?

The idea of community use of school buildings is not a new idea. When America was rural, the schoolhouse was, along with the church and the grange hall, the community meeting hall—and the place where people voted, where they heard speakers, and even where the circuit judge presided.

In the 1930s the concept of the "lighted schoolhouse" emerged, and small town and suburban schools were used for recreation, adult education, and the like. So, the idea builds on an American tradition of using schools for community purposes.

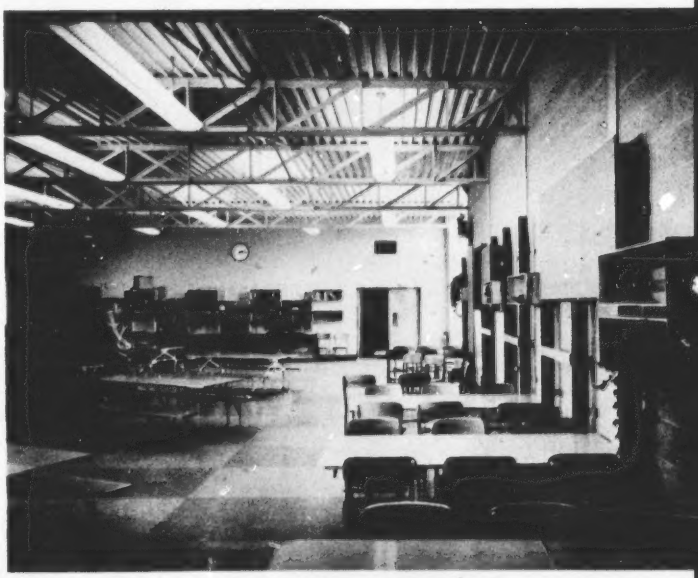
However, with the big building boom of the past—the post World War II years and growth of exurbia—schools began to be more isolated from their surrounding communities, and were closed at 3:30 in the afternoon and never opened on weekends and during vacations. School sites, especially in the cities, were surrounded by chain-link fences and closed except during the school day. America became compartmentalized—schools were for education, hospitals for health, parks for recreation, and city hall for government agencies. Each institution built, funded, and operated its own turf. Accounting procedures and government regulations inhibited sharing. The resulting separate places for separate services were both costly and inconvenient.

Now the community school center is attempting to break down that separateness and attempting to provide better coordinated services, with more efficient use of money, and a greater responsiveness to more human service needs than just K-12 education in a local community. ■



Let's talk more about sharing space.
What can be shared, by whom, and when?

Senior citizens lunch program
Day care
Movies
Lectures
Group discussions
Agency meetings
Storage
GED classes
Bridge club
Alcoholics Anonymous
Arts and crafts
Tutoring program
Dance class
Karate class
Calligraphy
First aid course



Activities such as those listed can easily be accommodated in spaces similar to the multipurpose room above

Many spaces that make up a center- or a typical school for that matter—can be shared by several activities and agencies: kitchens and dining rooms, gymnasiums and pools, conference and meeting rooms, auditoriums and theaters, shops and studios, to name a few. Obviously the use of the space must be carefully scheduled to avoid conflicts: a gym or pool can be used during the school day for physical education, and then turned over to the recreation department after school, evenings, and weekends when adults are free. All of these are called "shared use," and it's clear there are real savings to be made by such arrangements when they avoid duplicating space. Other spaces are more difficult to share—a health clinic can only be used for examination and treatment (though it may serve school children part of the day and adults at other times). Offices are usually single purpose, as are day care centers, workshops for the handicapped and the like.

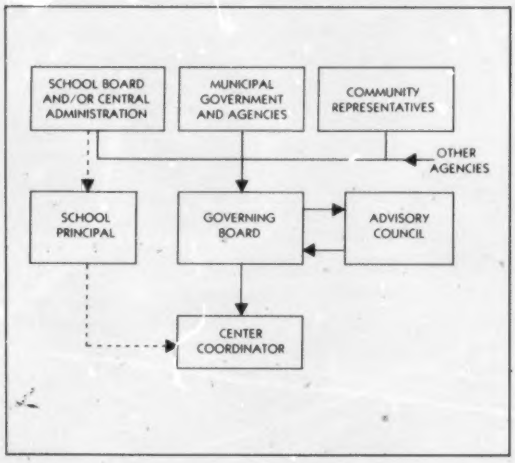
When parts of a building are reserved for other than the main purpose (school, in this case), it is called parallel use. Of course, even with parallel use, some sharing is possible, especially through programmed access to the specialized spaces previously listed, and in support services and facilities such as lounges, waiting rooms, reception areas, switchboard, mail and supply rooms, building services, and parking.

In addition to scheduling, the other issue that makes or breaks sharing is the cost of building maintenance and operation. Each service and agency should share these costs. Usually the total budget for heat, light, maintenance, janitorial, snow removal, and security services is prorated among the agencies and they are billed periodically.

So, sharing is possible—both of space and costs—and money can be saved if scheduling is worked out and duplication avoided. ■

How are these places governed? Who's in charge and who decides what services are provided, and who pays, and so on?

When the building is owned by the school district and the non-school use is not very extensive, the school principal is usually in charge of the building as well as the educational program. Programs of the other agencies are directed by personnel of those agencies. When the non-school use is extensive and several agencies share the building, a community-education director or services coordinator may manage the use of space and often coordinates programs.The coordinator may report to the principal or to a district-wide community education director, or may be employed by a governing council. Of course the persons in charge of each program in the center also report to the agencies that employ them—the Recreation Department, Health Department, Senior Citizens Council, Library Board and so on. The several staffs meet regularly to coordinate their programs and activities.



Because the centers serve communities, it is important that community interests and needs be represented in the programming and management. This is usually achieved by "community councils" made up of representatives of organizations in the community, agencies that serve the community through the center, and citizens at large. The councils vary in responsibility. Some are strictly advisory and become sounding boards that suggest new programs or program changes or communicate problems and issues to the administrators. Other councils are indeed governing councils—they establish budgets, hire the director, and make program decisions. No one arrangement is best in all situations, so each center's governance must be carefully planned to meet local conditions and needs. Nationally, the tendency is toward vesting responsibility in the council.

Whatever the governance arrangement, it is the end result that is important. Does it coordinate or combine services that the community needs? Does it provide programs which aren't being provided elsewhere? Are services responsive to the clients and community? Are there ways for community needs to be made known? Is there accountability for funds and programs? Are the lines of responsibility and reporting clear and workable? Is there a method for keeping the center relevant and viable? And, is there coordination among programs so that the "one-stop shopping" concept really works?

To that latter point, it is necessary that the program directors have a means of referring persons with needs to the agencies which can help them. Program directors usually meet on a scheduled basis to help assure smooth coordination.

We'll talk more about planning centers. For now, the point should be made that planning for governance of the center starts early, long before the place is designed and built.

And one word of caution. Bureaucracies tend to beget bureaucracies, and community centers are not free from this occupational disease. The governance arrangements must be flexible enough to allow change—adding, dropping and modifying programs, and taking advantage of opportunities when they come along. ■

Let's get back to money. How is the building funded, and who pays the operating costs?

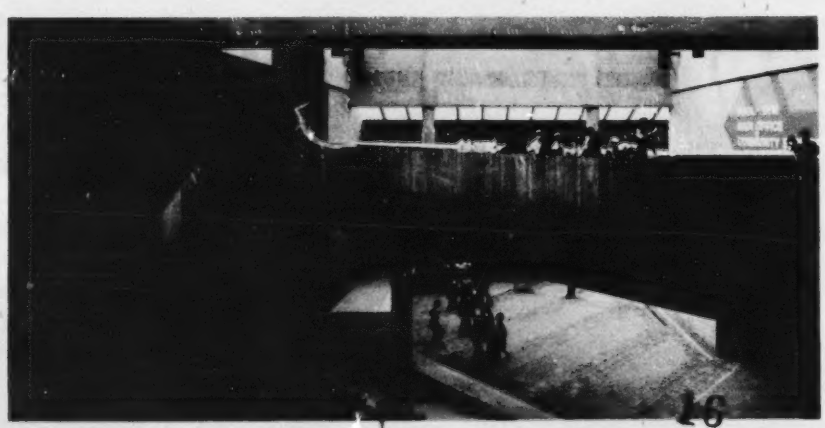
As we've said before, there's no single answer. But let's look at some of the choices.

- The school district may pay for the building and site and charge other tenants a share of the operating costs based on the space and services each uses. An alternative is for the school district to finance the building and each agency share in paying off the bonds as well as the operating costs.
- The school district may pay for the building—while another agency (often Parks and Recreation) contributes the site—and everybody shares operating costs. The school district may pay for the "school" part of the center (usually state aid will cover only normal school facilities) and then seek funds from a foundation, or a federal program (such as HUD's Community Development Block Grant Program, or Department of Commerce's Public Works Act) for the rest of the building.
- Several government agencies (the city, school district, recreation board) may pool their construction money (money from bond issues, special state funds, and so on).
- Sometimes a state or municipal agency may finance and build multi-use facilities which are then turned over to the school district and agencies to manage. This is especially possible if the school district is part of the city or county government (so-called fiscally dependent districts).

There's room for lots of creativity in putting together funding for a center. In one place, seven different sources of money, including local, state, and federal dollars, were used to build the center. Sometimes state laws and federal guidelines tend to inhibit how funds can be used. Obviously, the more sources of funds, the more complicated financing can be.

In terms of operating costs, the principle of sharing is the rule. Each agency pays its share of the heat, lights, custodian wages, snow removal, and so on, commensurate with the amount of time and space it uses.

There is also the interrelationship between capital and operating funds. Some agencies may be able to get federal funds for programs, but none for buildings. So, if the local municipality can pay for its share of the building, then the services can be provided without local operating dollars, and the community benefits from services it wouldn't otherwise have. ■



New North Community School, Springfield, Massachusetts. Construction funds came from the city of Springfield, HUD Neighborhood Facilities grant, HUD Legacy of Parks grant, federal Urban Renewal program (funds and credits), state aid for school construction (increased by 10% because the school aids racial integration), and state reimbursement for Urban Renewal expenditures

It used to take at least three years to plan just a school. Isn't planning a community school center much more complicated and time-consuming?

Yes. When planning includes several agencies and a broad spectrum of the community, conflicts and complications are sure to arise and they will have to be worked out. Also, when funding is from several sources—such as the school board, the city, the county, and the federal government—putting the financing together takes time and requires grant applications, appropriations, and sometimes a local bond referendum. So it does take longer than planning a school with a single owner and a single purpose.

Let's look further into some of the planning issues and how they affect the time required.

We've mentioned that broad participation by organizations, agencies, and community representatives is important. Many of these people will not have worked together before, (some will never have met), so it will take time to arrange meetings, communicate needs and problems, and reach the point of mutual understanding that will enable planning to begin.

Then there is the inventory of existing and desired community needs, resources, and services. This evaluation takes time, but it is fundamental to planning a center. And, of course, the inventory is developed through the participatory planning process—which may reveal other agencies that should be involved in the planning process.

Swimming pool	Workshops
Public library	Information center
Movie theater	Large restaurant
Gymnasium	Hobby rooms
Theater	Record library
Ice rink	Senior citizens drop-in center
Teen drop-in center	Arts and crafts center
Senior high school	Day care center
Children's playground	Record shop
Coffee shop/cafe	Music studio
Dance hall	Record listening room
Community park	Games room
Tennis courts	Reading lounge
Doctor's office	Club rooms
Book store	Preschool
Clothing store	Elementary school
Junior high school	Children's aid office
Public health unit	Bowling alley
Dental office	Family services office
Shopping center	Family drop-in center
Study area	Dance studio
Ball field	

A compilation of residents' priorities for community facilities in Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia, shows that a swimming pool and a library topped their lists

Planning group at work

It is quite likely that during the planning process the participants may change. New groups may join those already planning for a center. New leaders may take charge of participating agencies, bringing with them different priorities and concerns. It will take time to bring new participants up to date and to accommodate shifting concerns.

Finally, there will be inevitable conflicts arising from setting priorities (too many needs and too few resources), and from the shifts in power and responsibility that come with cooperative planning and management. The negotiations required to accommodate priority and power rearrangements will consume far more time than any physical planning, but they are necessary if the planning is to result in the most appropriate center. ■

How is the community school center concept tied into community renewal?

We've begun to realize that improving neighborhoods and communities means more than tearing down old and constructing new buildings, upgrading sewers and street lighting, and paving streets. It is also involving the community in improving, or even in providing for the first time, services that help residents achieve a better quality of life as well as a good feeling about participating in their community's future. Availability of health care, especially ambulatory care, is essential to a vital community, as is good public education, day care (especially for working mothers), job training and placement, and access to assistance provided by city, county, and state social service agencies.

The community school center, by coordinating services, increasing accessibility, and by providing a focus for community activities, can then be an important component in community renewal. In addition, the construction of a center, or the adaptive reuse of a surplus school or other building that might otherwise be derelict, can provide incentive for all kinds of related physical improvements in the neighborhood.

By making a physical, tangible commitment to a neighborhood that is starting to decline, and by providing needed human services and community focus, the people developing a community center are indeed aiding neighborhood renewal. ■

Is this a concept that works only in urban areas?

The community school center, in one form or another, can work in practically any location where community needs are unmet, and where the schools and other agencies recognize the advantages of a center and are willing to work together.

Most of the community school centers are found in the more densely populated areas. It is there that building sites are limited, that funds are in short supply, and that the range of services is greatest. There, too, are found the fiscally dependent school districts, which encourage coordination of programs through a municipal budget. It is also the cities that are in line for special state and federal funding to help finance centers and their programs, especially if the cities have a high level of unemployment, poverty, youth problems and the like.

It's generally true that the centers in the cities have the largest mix of programs, as the needs of cities are greater and more varied. In small towns and suburbs, often only one or two agencies join the schools in offering coordinated services— and the number one candidate is the recreation commission followed by libraries, day care, and senior citizens. Also, in small towns and suburbs, the community school center can provide a home for lots of small-scale local activities and organizations. No big deal—just give them space.

With all the Proposition 13-like moves to control taxes, no community is exempt from the pressure to spend public monies efficiently. Every community should look into the possibility that planning coordinated public services might not only be a more efficient way to use public funds, but also a more effective way to provide services. ■

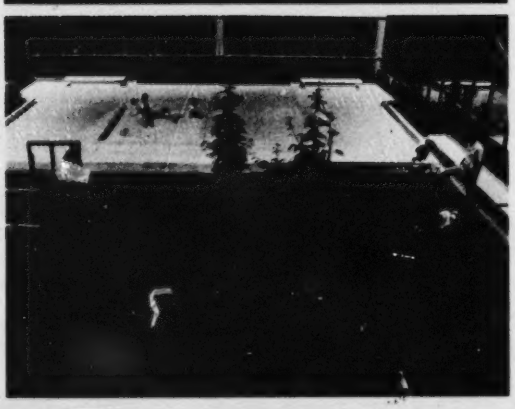
Can you give us some examples of existing centers in various locales? Or are we only talking about places that are being planned?

There are centers that have been open for several years which demonstrate interagency planning, governance, and funding. And, they are in various kinds of communities. For instance:

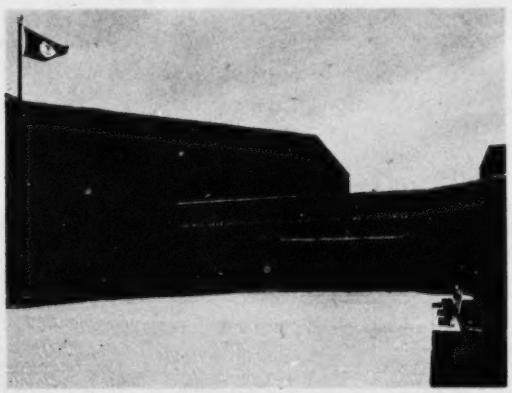
The Whitmer Human Resources Center in Pontiac, Michigan, was planned as part of a total redevelopment plan for the inner city. The center, which has been open since 1971, was the first to receive a federal Neighborhood Facilities grant which provided 25% of total costs. Planned and operated with community participation, the center includes an elementary school and several special education programs, a day care center, public restaurant, offices for ten community agencies, a health and dental clinic, and recreation and arts facilities.

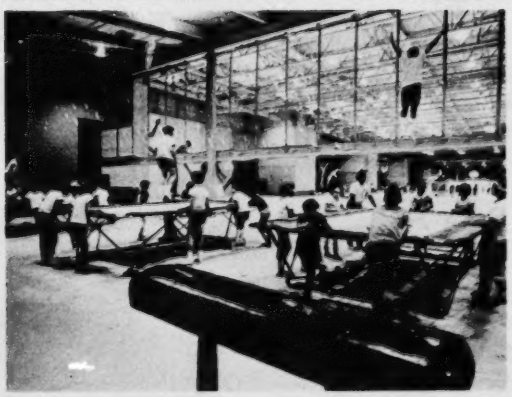
The John F. Kennedy School and Community Center, also opened in 1971, was built in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Atlanta, Georgia. Conceived by the superintendent of schools, it was planned by 18 government and social service agencies. Besides housing a middle school for 1,000 students, the center includes offices of the Atlanta Housing Authority, Family and Children Services, Social Security, Economic Opportunity

John F. Kennedy School and Community Center



Thomas Jefferson Junior High School and Community Center



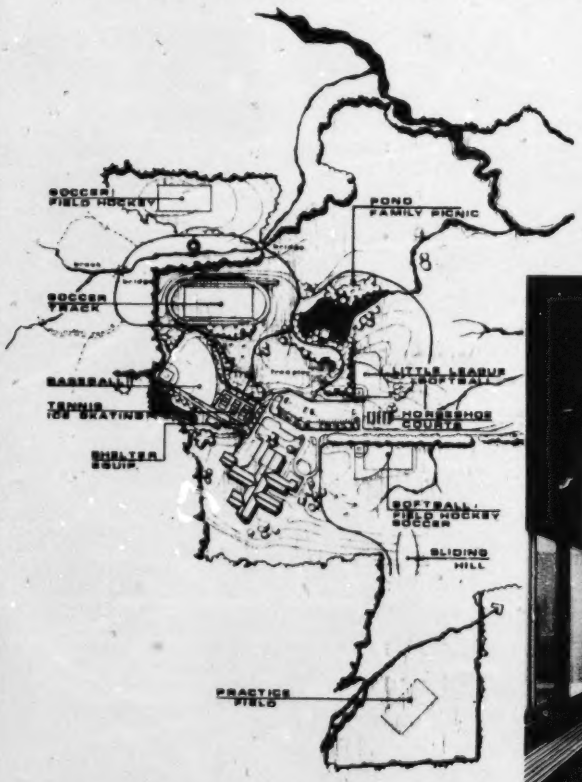


Atlanta, centers for senior citizens and mentally retarded people, as well as city-run recreation programs. Community participation is geared towards separate agencies, rather than towards the center as a whole.

More recently, Atlanta has opened several other centers which are located near schools but are funded and operated through the city government. They all have community members and agency members sitting together on single advisory councils.

The Thomas Jefferson Junior High School and Community Center, opened in 1972, is only one of many joint ventures between the school board and the county government of Arlington, Virginia, a wealthy suburb of Washington, D.C. The center was funded jointly by the county and schools and operates with funds from both agencies. It includes an elaborate fieldhouse for athletic activities, a community recreation center with a game room, canteen, dining commons, and clubroom, and a large theater. Sharing of space for a variety of activities is a major feature of the Jefferson center.

The Maranacook Community School is a new center (1976) located in rural Readfield, Maine, and draws students and participants from a radius of fifty miles and four townships. A great deal of community participation was involved in planning the high school (the first ever built in this area) and a community board selects center staff, budgets money, and otherwise conducts an extensive recreation, theater, and activities program. Funding came from the school district, the state, and the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. ■



Maranacook Community School

What about declining school enrollment? Isn't there less need for schools in many communities?

It's true that enrollment is declining in many places—nationally the decline will be over 10% from 1974 to 1983. However, in most places experiencing enrollment decline, the total population is **not** declining. Rather, the mix of our population is changing—fewer children, more young adults, and far more persons over 55. This is one reason why new services are required. Older persons need hot meals, recreation, and social activities; adults need continuing education and job training and retraining; working mothers (more than half the nation's school-age children have working mothers) need day care and after-school programs.

In addition to the changing mix of population and the corresponding need for services, school enrollment decline has a couple of other implications. First, the percentage of parents, the traditional mainstay of support for public education, is declining in most communities. Some estimate that as many as three-fourths of the voters in some communities do not have children in public schools. For education to broaden its base of public support, it makes sense that it reach out to a greater range of people. Adult education, job training and senior citizen programs are examples of just that; they add special purposes for the community school center.

Second, enrollment decline means underused school buildings. Most communities don't want to close schools if alternative uses can be found that retain the school for community purposes and pay a part of the cost of maintaining the building. So some surplus spaces—and entire schools—are being reused as community centers. For instance.

When the board of education in Dayton, Ohio, decided to close the Roosevelt High School in 1975, they offered it (separately) to the city and the comprehensive manpower training organization for $1.00 a year. Both declined the offer. The school board then decided to tear down the building, but the former principal argued for saving it and turning it into a community education center. The result is a one-man bootstrap operation. The director (the former principal) recruited tenants, who collectively pay the total cost of the building's upkeep as well as the director's salary. A number of vocational training programs are now located there, the 4-H Club is considering moving in, as are other organizations, and the city is now going to rent over 200,000 square feet to operate a recreation center. (The building has two swimming pools, two gymnasiums, and an indoor track!)

The Dudgeon elementary school in Madison, Wisconsin, was closed in 1969 when a replacement school was opened. The Dudgeon Neighborhood Association was instrumental in getting the board to reopen the building for other uses in 1971. The building is still oriented towards children and education. It houses three private elementary and nursery schools, and four childcare

Thornburn Community Activities Center

programs, a city-funded after-school recreation program, a childcare agency office, and adult classes run by a technical college. After trying a number of organizational arrangements, the building is now leased from the school board by one group which is responsible for overall maintenance and operations. That group in turn sublets space to the other tenants.

In Urbana, Illinois, the old Thornburn elementary school was closed due to declining enrollment. A citizens committee lobbied for conversion of the school into a community recreation center to be operated by the Urbana Parks Board. In 1972, citizens passed a referendum raising park district taxes to pay for an estimated $70,000 in renovation of building and grounds. The recreation department operates a wide variety of recreation programs and classes, a senior citizens center and childcare service. The building is also available on a fee basis for meetings and activities of community groups.

In Pickett, Wisconsin, the central focus of a rural area of about 600 households, the local school was closed in 1974 after consolidation with a larger school district. Community people who had fought to keep the school open formed a corporation and bought the school for $5,500. Using funds from a number of federal, state, and county agencies, and from bake sales, dinners, and other fundraising affairs, the center operates a day care and nursery school program, senior citizens center and nutrition program, recreation and summer activities for children, and adult classes. The building is available for use by any group of people for meetings, parties, family reunions, or any other use. This is a real grass roots venture under the direction of a community board of directors.

Enrollment decline and the community school center are directly related phenomena; surplus school space and buildings are often good places from which to deliver many services, and thus the school continues as a community asset, though its original purpose has changed. ■

Does a community school center have to be a new building? Our community just doesn't have the money to launch an expensive building campaign.

Community school centers can take any number of forms. They can be new buildings designed specifically for shared use and coordination of services. They can be developed by constructing an addition to an existing building. They can be a major renovation and expansion project which incorporates existing structures into a scheme of new buildings, or they can be old structures which have been renovated for the purpose.

Each of these solutions carries a different price tag. Different solutions will be appropriate to different communities.

Even if your community has no prospects for new buildings, or no buildings available for renovation, it is advisable to start the process of discussing community needs and assessing possibilites for coordination of services. That way, when a new building, addition, or renovation opportunity does come up, you will be ready to take advantage of it. In the meantime, smaller cooperative ventures using existing facilities can meet some identified community needs and can develop good relations among participants in future projects. ■

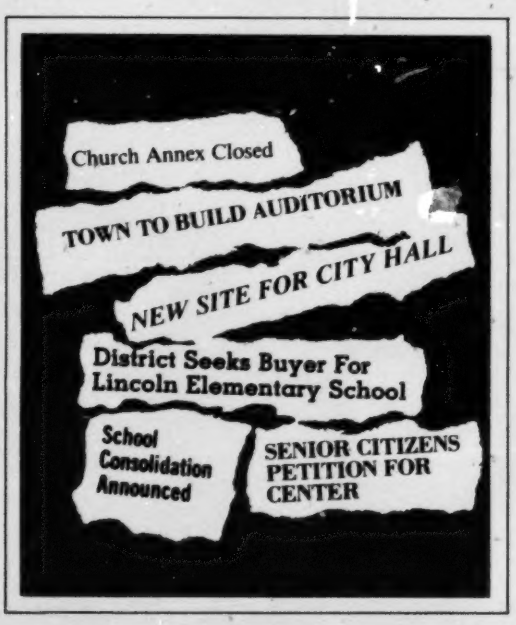
How do I know whether this makes any sense for my community? And if it does, how do I get started?

The first questions to ask yourself are, "Are there needs that aren't now being met and that might be provided by some form of cooperation? Or is there duplication of services that could be reduced by cooperation?"

Then find out if there are any immediate opportunities for introducing the community school center idea through the schools. Is there any change coming in the school system; is a new school to be built or is a school building to be closed? Is enrollment declining, and will the problem of surplus school space have to be faced?

Also, are there other public facilities being planned, such as a library or auditorium or art center that could be the focus of a multi-use center?

There are some other places to begin. Maybe a church building or some other well-located structure is surplus and offers an opportunity to be reused, maybe it's a historic building for which a new life should be formed. And possibly some public money, such as a Community Development Block Grant, is coming into town and shouldn't be spent just on sidewalks, roads, and sewers.


Church Annex Closed
TOWN TO BUILD AUDITORIUM
NEW SITE FOR CITY HALL
District Seeks Buyer For Lincoln Elementary School
School Consolidation Announced
SENIOR CITIZENS PETITION FOR CENTER

If the idea does make some sense, and there is a starting place, then test the notion of cooperation. Start with the school superintendent, a couple of board members, the mayor or supervisor, or the directors of agencies that are searching for a new home or need to expand services. Get one of them to convene a meeting of several of the interested parties to discuss problems—and opportunities. If hopes are realized, such discussions will spawn a leader or a task force that will take on further planning. (Don't forget that city and county planning departments have a good overview of the community, and a wealth of information that can help at this stage.)

If there is already a city or district agency that coordinates community education, that would be a good place to take your ideas. Or, if no such agency exists now, a local community leader—a politician—could help carry the ball.

When it's clear that the idea does make sense, then it's time to broaden the participation. The lead agency or person can convene meetings of all the interested community persons or agencies (and those that **should** be interested) to discuss needs and opportunities. From these meetings will emerge a broad-based planning group that will continue to develop the idea—which will sort out needs and opportunites, work out relationships and responsibilities, and eventually cope with funding—and engage professional planning and design assistance. And from this group will emerge the nucleus of those who will eventually help govern the center after it is opened.

Don't get discouraged. Remember that when planning involves people and organizations that haven't worked together before, the whole process is complicated and time-consuming. The benefits to be gained from a community school center are well worth the patience and effort required to see it through. ■

PICTURE AND ARCHITECTURAL CREDITS

6, 7 top Day Walters photographer,
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7 middle Steve Rosenthal photographer,
Quincy Community School, Boston
The Architects Collaborative architects
7 bottom left Robert Perron
7 bottom right Rondal Partridge
9 Larry Molloy
10 bottom left Joe Ringers
10 top, bottom right Day Walters
10 bottom right
13 Ezra Stoller photographer,
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15 Nathaniel Lieberman photographer,
Perkins & Will Partnership architects
16 Courtesy of Herman Miller
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18 top left Lary Molloy
18 bottom left Day Walters
18 top right, bottom right Day Walters photographer,
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19 Joseph W. Molitor photographer,
Harrison Associates architects
20 Courtesy of Urbana (Ill.) Parks & Recreation Department

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